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JUNE 30, 1916

5 Cents.

FAME ^{AND} FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF
BOYS THAT MAKE MONEY.

FIRST IN THE FIELD;
OR, DOING BUSINESS FOR HIMSELF.

AND OTHER STORIES

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



Bob suddenly grabbed Max Fowler and exclaimed: "Now, then, twenty-three for you! March— one, two, three!" The third step landed Fowler on the threshold of the shop, and a push completed his ignominious exit.

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FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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NEW YORK, JUNE 30, 1916

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FIRST IN THE FIELD

OR

DOING BUSINESS FOR HIMSELF

BY A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE BOOM AT RIVERDALE.

"Say, Joe," said Bob Channing, looking up from the copy of the Westgate semi-weekly "Times" he was reading, as his chum, Joe Craig, came walking up the gravel path that led from the shady street to the veranda of the Channing cottage, "what do you think? That one-horse little village of Riverdale, ten miles below here, has got a boom on."

"So I heard my father say the other day," replied Joe; "but I didn't take much stock in the report. Has the 'Times' got something to say about it this morning?"

"Yes; a whole lot."

"Let's hear," said Joe, in a tone of some interest. "Why, Riverdale hasn't even got a bank, I understand."

"That's right. The only thing of importance in the whole place is Graham's Mill, employing some sixty people. When the mill was started six months ago my father had an offer to take charge of the engine-room at a slight advance over his present wages, but as he had bought this cottage at a bargain, though he hasn't paid for it yet, he didn't consider he could afford to make any change."

"I'm glad of that, old man," replied Joe, "for I wouldn't like to have you move away. We've been chums ever since you came here to live, and I'd feel lost without you."

"Same here, Joe. Still, now that I'm through school, and have got to get to work, if I had any capital a growing place such as Riverdale promises to be from this out, is just the spot I'd like to anchor in and start a business of my own."

"Is that so?" asked Joe, in some surprise. "Why?"

"Because the fellow who is first in the field is the one who stands the best chance of getting ahead."

"There's something in that, I'll admit."

"Of course there is. But what's the use of talking? I haven't any capital, so there's no use of my thinking of going into business for myself."

"What kind of business would you like to go into?"

"I've often thought that I'd like to start a stationery and periodical store, with a soda water attachment, and candy and cigars for a side line."

"That's a good business, if you can get trade enough to keep the ball rolling."

"Sure it is. Charley Brown, on Main Street, has got such a shop, you know, and he tells me that he's doing fine, though he's got several competitors."

"Well, Westgate is a live town, and there are several thousand people here to draw upon. Now, Riverdale is only an obscure village, and it will take some years before it gets within hailing distance of this burg."

"Oh, I don't know. When one of our Western villages takes on a boom, such as Riverdale seems to be started on, it doesn't take long for it to become a place of some importance."

Joe didn't take the same enthusiastic view of the subject that Bob did, for he was built on different lines from his chum.

He had never thought about going into any business for himself, probably because he was somewhat deficient in ambition.

Bob, on the contrary, was a pushing, ambitious boy, always scheming and planning with an eye to the future. Some day he meant to be his own boss, and he didn't intend to permit the grass to grow under his feet just because he did not see any immediate prospect of reaching that desirable condition.

While it is true that there is a saying that all things come to him who waits, it does not exactly mean that success comes to him who, Wilkins Micawber-like, waits for something to turn up.

Bob, while obliged by circumstances to wait until things began to come his way, was a boy who was wide awake enough to scent a favorable slant of good luck in the distance and then hustle to meet it half way and grab it before it got by him.

He was determined when Fortune knocked at his door to be right on hand to tell the capricious dame to walk in and make herself at home.

In fact, he would have helped her to take her hat and cape off, and pushed a chair forward for her to sit down, so that she couldn't find any excuse for leaving.

Bob's energy and perseverance made him a general favorite with his comrades, for he took the lead in all sports, and made things hum when he was around.

Whether it was at a game of baseball, or a row on the river that ran by the town, or a spin on the wheel, or a tackle at football, he went at it as though it was the business of his life, and consequently he became a shining mark among his school-fellows, and they were proud to acknowledge him as their leader.

Bob's father and mother were naturally very proud of him, and the former especially said that the boy was a comer, and from all indications he seemed to be right.

"Well," said Joe, in answer to Bob's last remark, "let's hear what the 'Times' has to say about Riverdale."

"It has this to say," replied Bob, picking up the paper and referring to the column in which the news appeared.

Then he read out all the particulars printed about the boom that the village in question was taking on.

Several enterprising business men from Chicago had picked out Riverdale as an ideal spot at which to put up a big bolt and nut works, a carriage manufactory, a furniture factory, and one or two other enterprises that would employ a considerable number of people.

They had laid their plans before the directors of the railroad company whose line traversed the country within eight miles of the village, touching at Westgate ten miles to the west, and Chester twenty miles to the east, and the company

found it advantageous to their interests to begin the immediate construction of a branch line from Centerville, the nearest town to Riverdale.

Sidney Graham, proprietor of the Graham Mill, and several of the more important residents of the village, had, in view of the expanding interests of Riverdale, recently applied for a charter to establish a bank, and this would be opened for business as soon as the necessary formalities had been gone through with.

A printer from Chester was putting in a plant to establish a weekly newspaper, and several other businesses were soon to be introduced into the place.

Altogether, Riverdale bade fair to shortly take its place on the map, and in the gazetteers as something better than a mere collection of houses strung for the most part on one shady street.

The Westgate "Times" did not apprehend that the boom would hurt the growth of that town in the least, and it therefore took the occasion to congratulate the little village on its coming wave of prosperity.

"Well, what do you think of Riverdale now, Joe?"

"It seems to be looking up and taking notice," grinned Joe.

"Take my word for it, that a year from now the oldest inhabitant won't be able to recognize the village. It will be a lively little town that will make even Westgate here get a hustle on to keep in the van."

"Ho! Don't you believe it. Riverdale will never get within hailing distance of this place."

"Is that so? Well, don't you be too sure of it. Remember, it's got one advantage over this town: it's practically at the head of navigation on the river. The shallows, two miles this side of Riverdale, where the river narrows out through the woods, cuts off Westgate from the east by water. No craft of any depth can pass that point. Snake River, so far as this place is concerned, is little better than a long and narrow lake."

"What of it? Westgate hasn't much use for the river, anyway. The railroad is good enough for us. River navigation is out of date."

"No, it isn't out of date, by any means. However, I won't argue the matter, as it would only be a waste of time. All I can say is, that if I had a little capital I'd go right to Riverdale now, rent a shop as close to the new railroad station as I could get, and open up a business on the lines I mentioned."

"And you think you would succeed, do you?"

"It wouldn't be my fault if I didn't. I wouldn't sit behind the counter and let people find out that I was there. Not on your life. I'll bet every person in the village would know inside of twenty-four hours after I had my stock on my shelves that Bob Channing was prepared to sell them anything in the stationery, periodical, cigar and candy line that they could reasonably expect to get within a radius of a hundred miles about. What I didn't carry in stock I'd get for them, so I wouldn't give one of them an excuse for sending either to Chester, or Centerville, or this place for anything in my line. All the new factory hands that are coming to Riverdale will want tobacco, cigars and reading matter, and I'm the boy that would supply them right up to the handle."

"Gee! I believe you'd get along all right," said Joe, impressed by his chum's earnestness and enthusiasm. "I'd like to be your partner."

"I'm afraid the business wouldn't stand a partner for some time, or I'd be glad to have you with me."

"You talk just as if you expected to open up there."

"I talk just as I feel, that's all. I wish I was in the position to take advantage of the situation, but I'm not, unfortunately. Some other fellow will step in and garner the cream, if he's smart enough. One of these days, however, I'll be on hand somewhere with both feet, and then I'll have the chance to carry out my business ideas as I see fit."

"You'll never get left, I'll bet a hat. I wish I had your head."

"Oh, your head is all right, I guess, only we're not alike. We probably wouldn't both succeed at the same thing. Find what you're cut out for and then put your whole soul into making that thing a success, and the chances are you'll come out a winner in the end. Now let's go swimming."

CHAPTER II.

THE STOLEN POCKETBOOK.

"What's the matter, father?" asked Bob Channing, as he walked into the engine-room of the Westgate Woolen Mills

next morning about eleven o'clock and saw his father seated on a stool with his head buried in his hands.

Richard Channing, whose overalls and checked jumper, stained with grime and oil spots, plainly showed that he was the engineer of the mills, raised his head and looked at his stalwart, good-looking son.

Bob was alarmed at the expression he saw on his father's features.

His face was ghastly pale, a look of mute despair shone out of his eyes, and he was trembling with excitement.

"Matter!" ejaculated the engineer, in hollow tones. "I've lost my pocketbook."

"Lost your pocketbook?" answered Bob, rather surprised at the intense emotion displayed by his father, for Mr. Channing was not in the habit of carrying much more than a dollar about him for pocket money. "There wasn't much in it, was there?"

"Wasn't much in it!" exclaimed his father, in a hoarse voice. "There was twelve hundred dollars in it."

"Twelve hundred dollars!" gasped Bob, in amazement.

"Yes. Every cent I had in the bank. I drew it an hour ago, intending to pay off the mortgage on our cottage, which is due to-day. Now the money is gone—lost. Oh, heaven, what shall I do?"

Bob was staggered by this unexpected revelation.

He knew that his father and mother had been practising great economy for the past three years in order to save the money to wipe out the mortgage on their home.

He had heard his father say the night before at supper that on the morrow they would own the cottage free and clear of any incumbrance, and both his parents seemed to be very happy over the bright prospect ahead.

Now, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, came this announcement that his father had, at the eleventh hour, lost the money he had striven so hard to accumulate.

It is simply a terrible and overwhelming misfortune, and the boy no longer wondered at the despairing haggard look on his father's countenance.

"You say you drew the money from the bank an hour ago, father?" asked Bob.

"Yes."

"Did you lose the money on the street?"

"No. I had it when I came back to the engineroom, for I opened the pocketbook and looked at it just before I took off my coat and hung it up on yonder nail."

"Have you been out of the engine room since you came back?"

His father shook his head gloomily.

"Then it must be in your pocket still," said Bob, hopefully, starting for the packet, which now lay upon the tool bench.

"It isn't. I searched every pocket thoroughly, though I knew positively I put it in the inside pocket."

"Has any stranger been in here since you returned?"

"There's been no one here but Steve Fowler."

Bob glanced around the engine-room and observed Fowler, the fireman, watching them in a furtive manner from under his shaggy, beetling eyebrows.

He was a surly fellow, who had a standing grouch against the world because things didn't seem to go as well with him as with other people.

In stature he was short and burly, and from the way he handled the iron coal barrow and shoveled the fuel into the furnace, was evidently very strong.

Among his other failings was a great liking for drink, to gratify which at all times he was accustomed to smuggle a pocket flask of whisky into the engine-room.

This was against the rules of the mill, and also against the express orders of the engineer, but Fowler persisted in fetching the flask and taking surreptitious drinks when his superior's back was turned.

He seemed to work better after each drink, and at no time was he so much under the influence of the stimulant that he couldn't do his duty right up to the handle.

For that reason, and also because Fowler had a large family dependent on him for support, Richard Channing refrained from reporting his conduct to the superintendent, and thus bringing about his discharge.

Bob Channing didn't like Steve Fowler's attitude at that moment, and a grave suspicion entered his head.

If his father hadn't been out of the engine-room since he came back from the bank, and knew that the money was in his jacket when he hung it on its accustomed hook, and nobody had been in the place since except the fireman, it struck the boy that it was quite within the bounds of reason

to suppose that Steve Fowler might know something about the missing pocketbook.

Whether it was that there was something in the boy's eye that disquieted the fireman or because he had some other reason for quitting his post, he laid down the oil can he had been using up to that moment and sauntered slowly and doggedly toward the door.

"Look here, Fowler," said Bob, stepping up to the fireman, "have you seen my father's pocketbook anywhere?"

"No, I haven't," replied Steve in a sulky and defiant tone.

"Did you help my father hunt for it?"

"No. He didn't ask me to."

"It was an oblong, black pocketbook, wasn't it, father?"

"Yes."

"What's that sticking out of your shirt now, Fowler?" asked Bob, turning suddenly on the fireman and pointing at his chest.

This was a pure bluff on the boy's part, as he didn't see any sign of the pocketbook in question on Fowler, but his suspicions being aroused, he wanted to see how the fireman would take it.

Steve looked startled, grabbed his undershirt, which was half open at the neck, and pulled it over, and edged toward the door.

Bob's words and the man's action had a remarkable effect on Mr. Channing.

It seemed as if he suddenly woke up to the realization that his fireman might have taken advantage of a moment of inattention on his part and have abstracted the wallet from his jacket.

It was quite possible that Fowler had seen him look at the pocketbook when he got back, and had noticed that there was considerable money in it, and then had watched his chance to steal it.

"Steve Fowler," roared Mr. Channing, springing to his feet and clutching the fireman by the wrists as he held his shirt closed, "did you take my pocketbook?"

"No, I didn't," answered the man, doggedly.

"Let me see what you've got inside your shirt," said the engineer, clawing at his assistant's undergarment.

Fowler started back with an imprecation and tried to throw Mr. Channing off.

This action only made the engineer more persistent to get at the truth.

A violent struggle took place between them.

Mr. Channing had worked himself into a condition very unusual for a man of his even temperament.

Bob was astonished at the sudden display of fury he exhibited.

In the mix-up Fowler's shirt was torn and the boy, whose alert eye was watching every move of the struggling men, distinctly saw the end of an oblong, black object thrust down into the fireman's bosom next his skin.

Satisfied that that was the missing wallet, Bob sprang forward to seize and drag it forth into the light.

At that moment Fowler, with a desperate effort, hurled the engineer away from him with great force.

Mr. Channing staggered against the tool bench and went down on the floor.

Bob, however, reached for the wallet, but as his fingers closed around the end of it, Fowler, with a scream of rage, shoved him away and rushed out of the doorway.

Recovering his balance, the boy darted after him and saw him making for a corner of the yard.

It was close to noon, and the time-keeper was crossing the yard toward his post at the closed gate to take the names of the employees who left the premises during dinner hour.

"Stop him! Stop that man!" yelled Bob.

The clerk heard him, but not seeming to comprehend the situation he permitted Fowler to pass him.

Bob then redoubled his efforts to overtake the fireman.

As he could outstrip Steve on a straight course, he overhauled him rapidly.

Suddenly the rascal made for the door of the office.

Fowler reached it a shade ahead of pursuer, swung it open, passed through, and then slammed it in Bob's face.

This scarcely delayed the boy more than a moment, but nevertheless it gave the fireman an opportunity to cross the outer end of the office and dart through the main entrance into the street.

Bob was soon at his heels again and caught up with him at the corner of the mill fence.

"Hand over that pocketbook, Steve Fowler, or I'll have you

arrested," cried the boy, reaching out one hand and grabbing the man by the shoulder.

Steve's answer was to turn suddenly and plant a heavy blow on Bob's forehead, which knocked the daylights out of him for several moments, sending him to the ground.

When Bob staggered to his feet and looked around in a dazed way for Fowler, the fireman had disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

FIRE.

Bob figured that Fowler must have passed up or down the next street, a few yards away, so he began to make inquiries of people in the vicinity.

He found a man who had seen the fireman running toward the river which flowed by the town, and the boy resumed his pursuit in that direction.

As Steve's home was in this direction, Bob judged that he was making for it, and with that idea in his mind he made a short cut across lots, hoping to overtake him before he could reach shelter.

When he struck the river road, which was shaded by a great many trees, there was no sign of Fowler in sight.

This was a great disappointment to Bob, for he had counted on cutting the fireman off, and the boy was keyed up for the expected struggle between them.

Looking up and down the road, Bob saw his friend, Joe Craig, seated on a sawed-off tree-stump, fishing.

Joe observed the approach of his chum and shouted to him to come over.

Bob dashed across the road.

"Hello! what's the matter?" asked Joe. "You look excited."

"Have you seen Steve Fowler down this way within the last few minutes?" asked Bob, disregarding Craig's question.

"No," replied Joe, in surprise. "Why should he be here at this hour?"

"He stole a pocketbook from my father containing \$1,200, and is trying to get away with it."

"He did!" exclaimed Craig, much astonished. "When?"

"Half an hour ago. I followed him from the engine-room to the corner of the mill fence near Blank Street, where I overtook him, but when I thought I had him cornered he hit me a blow in the face that knocked me silly for a minute or two, and when I got on my feet he was out of sight. Mr. Creswell, who runs a small grocery store near the corner, told me that he had seen Fowler running down toward the river, and thinking he was bound home I chased this way to try and head him off. I'm afraid now that he went in the opposite direction."

"And he has stolen \$1,200 of your father's money?" said Joe. "That's a small fortune."

"It's a fortune to us. It's taken my father over three years to save it."

"That's tough! How did he come to get away with it?"

"My father drew it from the bank this morning, intending to pay off the mortgage on our cottage with it. He hung his coat up in the engine-room, with the wallet in it. In some way Fowler got wind of the fact that the pocketbook contained considerable money, so he watched his chance when my father wasn't looking and collared it. I never thought much of Steve, but I did not think he was bad enough to rob my father, who, on the whole, has been good to him."

"You'll have to put the police onto him right away. They should be able to catch him before he can get very far."

"I dare say father has done that by this time," replied Bob; "but I'd give a good deal to catch the rascal myself. The worst of it is, he's so strong that I can't handle him myself."

"You can count on me to help you if you only know where we might be able to find him," said Joe, winding in the line and stowing it away in his pocket.

"We could follow the road down the river on the chance of getting on his trail," said Bob, in a tone that was not over-confident of results.

"Let's do it," replied Joe, jumping to his feet. "Hello! Isn't that him now, coming down the river in a rowboat?"

Bob looked in the direction pointed out by Joe, and sure enough he recognized Steve Fowler, in a boat, pulling lustily at a pair of oars.

"I'll bet he's making for his house to get some clothes before skipping out," he said. "We'll get behind the hedge and follow him in that direction. When he lands, and is about to enter his cottage, we'll take him by surprise, and get the wallet away from him."

"All right," agreed his companion, and they started off.

Occasionally they glanced through the hedge at the river as they went along, and thus kept their quarry in sight.

At length they came in sight of the Fowler cottage, which was hardly a presentable kind of habitation after having been in Steve's possession half a dozen years.

It was a one-story-and-a-half affair, sadly in need of a coat of paint, and much out of repair.

The Fowler family consisted of Steve himself, his wife, who found it necessary to go out washing for the neighbors about twice a week to make both ends meet, Max Fowler, a disagreeable young bully of seventeen years, and three younger children, all girls.

Max was a good-for-nothing boy, who might have helped the family finances if he had been disposed to work regularly.

Why his father didn't compel him to be industrious was a mystery.

Certain it is he was idle about three-quarters of his time, and what he made when he worked he spent on himself in one way or another.

He wouldn't even stay around the cottage when his mother was away to look after his sisters, and to prevent the children from wandering down to the river at the risk of falling in and being drowned Mrs. Fowler was accustomed to lock them in the house when she was absent.

"We'd better get a stick apiece to use as a club, hadn't we?" suggested Joe, as they drew near their destination. "Steve Fowler is not an easy proposition to handle."

Bob agreed that it would be a good idea to provide themselves with a weapon of some kind before tackling the burly fireman, and the boys looked around for something that would answer for cudgels.

While they were thus employed they heard a succession of shrill screams coming from the direction of the cottage.

"What's up now?" asked Joe, looking ahead.

The screams were childish ones, and seemed to be inspired by terror.

Evidently something unusual was going on at the Fowler home.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Bob, observing smoke coming out of the front windows. "I do believe the house is on fire."

"I guess you're right," replied Joe. "The kids are yelling to beat the band. It's a wonder they don't run out into the road."

Neither of the boys was aware of Mrs. Fowler's practice of locking the little ones in when she went off to her day's work.

"Steve has heard the racket, and I guess he sees the smoke, too, for he's working hard at his oars," said Joe. "It will take him some little time to reach the nearest point of the shore. It looks as if we'll have to lend a hand to save his home and then settle with him afterward. If he's got any gratitude he'll be willing to give up that money in return for our services. If he hasn't we'll make him, if we have to knock the daylight out of him."

Even as he spoke the cries of the children grew more shrill and agonizing, while the smoke increased in density.

Satisfied that the little ones were in peril of their lives, Bob momentarily dismissed his concern about the pocketbook from his mind and, followed by Joe, started at full speed for the burning cottage.

Bob dashed up to the front door and tried the handle.

It was locked.

"Come around the back," he said, making a break for the rear of the building.

On trying the kitchen door he found that locked, too.

"No wonder the young ones can't get out," he said, excitedly. "We've got to break in, Joe."

"That's what we have to do," replied his companion.

Fortunately, there was an axe standing against a small woodpile, and Joe got it.

With one blow he smashed in the lock and the door swung open inward.

Bob rushed inside and made his way to the front room, where he had seen the smoke issuing from the window.

A girl of seven lay shrieking on the rag carpet, her dress on fire, while two younger children stood near by crying and terribly frightened at their sister's peril.

Bob rushed into an adjoining bedroom, tore the comforter from the bed, and, returning to the blazing room, wrapped the little girl in it, smothering out the flames that had already destroyed the greater part of her lower garments.

Joe in the meantime had found a bucket in the kitchen, and had fetched it full of water from the well in the yard.

Bob removed the comforter so his companion could pour water over the smoldering clothes of the little girl, who continued to scream with fright and the pain of her burns, from which she doubtless suffered considerably.

Bob tried his best to calm her, but with little success.

The whole side of the room, however, was on fire by this time, and the smoke was beginning to stifle them.

Bob saw the necessity of removing the children from the danger that threatened.

"Run the kids outside, Joe. I'll follow with this girl."

Craig seized the little ones each by a hand and hurried them out into the yard, while Bob followed with the sufferer in his arms.

"We've got to try and save the house, if we can, Joe," said Bob, laying the girl down near the well. "Stay with your sister, little ones, and don't dare move away," he added to the children.

They regarded him with a look of awe and huddled around the other girl, whose shrieks were now reduced to pitiful moans.

The boys looked around the kitchen for more pails, but none were to be seen.

"Get hold of that pan; it will have to answer. I'll go into the front room for the bucket you had," ordered Bob, assuming command of the situation.

"All right," replied Joe, seizing the pan and making for the well.

Bob entered the burning room, which was now filled with smoke that was pouring out of the two front windows, and grabbed the pail.

He could see the lurid flames creeping up the window frames, and all about the wall.

The boy was afraid that the fire had got too great a headway for them to cope successfully with it.

"I'm afraid it's a hopeless job," he muttered, his eyes beginning to smart from the smoke, as he retreated to the doorway. "However, we'll do the best we can, and that's all we can do."

As he left the room the flames seemed to take a fresh hold on the inflammable material at their mercy.

Apparently the cottage was doomed.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAPPED.

The boys carried two or three pails and pans of water into the front room and threw their contents on the flames without materially diminishing the conflagration.

A half-consumed toy stove lying against the blazing baseboard, and a box of matches beside it, suggested the origin of the fire.

Bob soon saw that it was useless to continue to pour water on the flames in the room when he saw that the fire had penetrated the attic.

Unless the blaze could be arrested above, the roof was bound to catch in a few minutes.

So, when they filled their pail and pan again, Bob led the way upstairs, and found the fire just coming through the floor.

Turning the contents of the pan carefully into the blazing hole, he sent Joe back for another supply of water and then continued the good work with the pailful he had carried up himself.

The boys had forgotten all about Steve Fowler in the excitement of the moment, and now that rascal came rushing on the scene in a badly demoralized state.

Joe met him as he issued from the kitchen.

"Get hold of something to carry water and help save your house," said Joe as he hurried past.

Steve caught sight of his three little ones and rushed over to them.

At that moment his wife, who was working not far away and had at length caught sight of the smoke, came running frantically on the scene, followed by two men.

She grabbed the burned girl in her arms and began to cry out for a doctor.

Steve, forgetting about the money he had on his person, hurried away to the house of a physician about half a mile away.

The two men started in to help the boys put out the fire.

By the time Steve returned with the doctor the exertions of the four had subdued the flames, although they had a strenuous job for a while on their hands.

Bob had suffered the most from the smoke on account of the position he had maintained in the attic so long as there was any danger.

When he rejoined Joe below his eyes were red and swollen, and smarted a good bit.

As soon as he got the chance, he drew a bucket of water and began bathing them.

The little girl in the meantime had told her mother how Bob had saved her from being burned up, and how Joe had carried her sisters outside the house, and thus saved their lives, too.

The poor woman was deeply grateful to the boys, and expressed her gratitude as best she could under the circumstances.

As soon as his cottage was out of danger, Steve suddenly recollected what had brought him home, and he hastened to get a coat and hat and try to steal away.

Joe saw him when he started for the river.

"Fowler is trying to skip, Bob," he said to his chum. "We'd better get after him at once and prevent him from getting afloat in the boat."

Bob hurriedly dried his smarting eyes, and with Joe started for the road.

Steve was making tracks for his boat.

"Hold on there, Steve Fowler," cried Bob. "Come back and hand over my father's money."

Steve cast a rapid glance over his shoulder and, seeing the two boys in pursuit, broke into a run.

Evidently it was his purpose to hold on to the money.

"Well, he's an ungrateful beast," growled Joe. "He knows you saved the life of his oldest girl, and this is the way he is repaying you. Dern him, I could kick him!"

Joe stopped, picked up a stone and flung it at the rascal.

It missed him by a foot and fell with a splash into the river.

Before Steve could step aboard his boat, which he had moored to an old flatboat that had stranded at that point, Bob was upon him.

The rascal turned upon the boy with a snarl of rage.

Seizing him by the shoulders and exerting all of his great strength, he fairly flung the lad down the opening of the little cuddy at the after end of the boat.

Bob landed with a jolt that deprived him of consciousness.

Joe was furious at the attack made upon his companion and flew to his aid.

He was equally helpless in the grip of the fireman, who swung him aboard the flatboat as though he were a child, and tumbled him on top of his chum.

Steve then noticing the sliding door to the cuddy, pulled it over and secured it in place by thrusting the stout pin through the hasp.

The boys were made prisoners in the little 4x6 foot space below deck, and Steve Fowler was master of the situation.

With an evil laugh he unloosed the painter of his own boat, and as he stepped into her the small flatboat rocked under his weight.

This seemed to suggest a new idea to him.

He worked the rowboat around to the beach, stepped ashore, and while he held the line in his hand he gave the other craft a heavy push, which partially set her afloat.

A second push completed his object, and the current catching the flatboat began to carry her off into midstream.

Presently she was floating down with the tide, and Steve, with a grim chuckle, got into his own boat and, shipping the oars, followed her with leisurely strokes.

In the meantime Joe had crawled off of Bob and was trying to bring his companion to his senses, which was not a difficult matter, as Bob was already coming to himself.

With the door of the cuddy shut, the place would have been wrapped in Cimmerian darkness but for two small openings about six inches square on either side of the boat that answered for windows.

They admitted light and air, and through one shone the rays of the early afternoon sun.

"Well, how are you feeling, Bob?" asked Joe, when his companion sat up and looked around in a bewildered way.

"Kind of rocky," replied Channing. "Where are we? I thought that rascal fired me down into a hole."

"That's what he did. He threw you down into the after hold of a small flatboat that was stranded on the river bank, and when I went for him he treated me to a dose of the same medicine. He's as strong as a horse."

"We've got to get out of here as quick as we can. I suppose he's off in his boat by this time, and we'll lose him."

"He pulled the slide over after he bundled me on top of you," said Joe. "I hope he didn't find a way to secure it, for if he did we're in a pretty fix."

"Say, this craft seems to be afloat. I thought you said it was stranded on the shore."

"So it was. It must have worked off, or Fowler pushed it off. I remember now that the old thing rocked two or three times while I was floundering about."

Joe reached for the slide and tried to open it, but found that it resisted his best efforts.

"Gee! It is secured on the other side, Bob. We're prisoners for fair. What are we going to do now?"

"Try and kick the old thing open, if you can," returned Bob. "I'll help you."

They made an united assault on the door, but found it too stout for the heels of their shoes.

"No go, old man," said Joe, at length. "We're like a pair of rats caught in a trap. Here we are likely to remain until we can attract assistance."

Bob went to one of the small openings in the side of the cuddy and Joe to the other, and looked out on the surface of the river.

The stream was about two hundred yards wide at this point, and though the sense of motion was imperceptible to the boys, a glance at the river banks showed them that they were slowly moving down the stream.

They found that they were about midway in the river.

"Hello!" cried Bob. "Here's Steve now, rowing past us." Joe turned around and looked over his companion's shoulder.

Fowler was abreast of their observation hole, a few yards away.

He saw the faces of the two boys framed in the little window and he gave them the sardonic laugh.

To better enjoy his triumph he pulled close alongside of the flatboat.

"Well, my chickabiddies, how do you like it in there?" he asked, with a grin.

"You're a nice man, you are," returned Bob, in a tone of disgust. "A fine way to treat us after we saved your cottage from being destroyed and your children from being burned to death. I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself."

"I had to look out for myself. You chaps had no business to follow me," replied Steve.

"No business to follow you?" cried Bob. "After you had stolen every cent of my father's savings!"

"I couldn't resist the temptation of takin' the money when it was so easy to get at. And now I've got it I'm goin' to keep it. I never could earn so much money if I lived to be a hundred. The world hasn't treated me right. I've as much right to have money as your father, for I worked harder than he did. But luck was agin me and in his favor. Now I've evened things up. He's got a good job and can make the money over agin; I never could make it workin', so I've took it and mean to make the most I can out of it. If you'd left me alone you wouldn't have got into your hole. Now you've got to stay where you are till somebody comes along and lets you out."

With these parting words he resumed rowing once more, and soon shot out of range of the boys' vision.

CHAPTER V.

DOWN THE RIVER.

"It looks as if our names are Mud at present," said Joe, gloomily, as the sound of Steve's oars died away in the distance ahead.

"It's too bad. He'll escape with that money now, and my father never will recover it," replied Bob, dejectedly.

"If your father has notified the police, as I should think it likely he has done long before this, they will probably telephone to Riverdale, Chester and other places to be on the lookout for Fowler, and in that way he might get caught."

"It is more than likely that he won't land anywhere until after dark, if he does then. It's my opinion he'll remain on the river till he gets down to Chester. That's thirty miles from here. Then he'll land somewhere above the town, sneak to the railroad station and board a train for the East. After that one might as well hunt for a needle in a haystack as to expect to overhaul him."

"He's a measly scamp, if there ever was one. That money won't do him any good."

"Perhaps not, but that will give my father very little satisfaction."

"I wish we could get out of this hole."

"I wish so, too."

"How fast do you suppose we're going?"

"We are floating away from Westgate at the rate of three or four miles an hour, I should think."

"What time do you think it is?"

"Around two o'clock."

"If nobody boards this derelict, we're likely to float all the way to Chester," said Joe.

"Yes, and even beyond."

"It will be long after dark before we reach that town at this rate."

"There's no doubt about that."

"As we haven't had our dinners, we'll be pretty hungry long before we get there," growled Joe. "I'm feeling peckish already."

"I'm not thinking about my stomach—it's the probable loss of the money that worries me."

"I don't blame you. It's a big sum to lose."

"If we could only get out of this part of the hold, we might find a chance somehow of overtaking that rascal, though I suppose he's out of sight by this time."

"We must keep a bright lookout for people along the banks—you watch out of that window and I'll look out of this—wave our handkerchiefs and yell when we see any one near the shore. That seems to be our only show."

"We'll do that, but these holes are so plaguey small that at a hundred yards or so we're not likely to be seen."

"They could see the handkerchief all right."

"But would the meaning of the signal be understood? The waving of a handkerchief is more of a salute than anything else, and that's the way folks take it."

"We could attract their attention first with the handkerchief and then yell for help."

"Even if they understood that we were in a tight box, how could any one reach us from the bank unless he had a boat handy?"

"That's so," replied Joe, with a glum look. "I didn't think of that."

"Well, don't be discouraged. We're not going to give up the ship just because things look a bit bad. Never say die, is my motto."

"Let's make another attack on the door," said Joe.

They battered away at it with great energy until they saw that it was simply useless work on their part.

"Nothing short of a battering-ram will have any effect on that slide," said Bob. "I wonder how that rascal fastened it?"

"Give it up. I guess it's held by a hasp and staple arrangement. It shakes, you can see."

"However it's fastened beats me. Let's take a look at the bulkhead that separates this place from the main hold. If we could find a weak board we might be able to batter our way through."

"That would be all right if the hatchway is open."

An examination failed to disclose any weak board, nor was there a knothole through which they could peer into the space beyond.

Then they fell to examining the two cupboards in the cuddy.

One of them was empty, the other held a few broken dishes, a stout gimlet, a fishing line with several hooks attached, a broken knife, and various odds and ends of no value.

"If we could bore enough holes in that door in a circle with this gimlet we might be able to knock a piece out large enough to put an arm through and thus reach the staple, if it is a staple that's holding the old thing," said Joe.

"Judging from the apparent thickness of the door, that would be an all-day job," replied Joe. "However, you might try one hole and see how thick the wood really is."

Joe tackled the job and worked away for a while like a good fellow while Bob kept his eye on the shore through each window alternately.

"There's one hole done," said Joe. "The wood is about an inch thick, but hard grained. I hardly think it will pay to keep on."

"We're drifting over toward the north shore," said Bob. "It isn't impossible but we may run aground at one of the turns in the river."

Joe put the gimlet in his pocket and stood beside his companion watching the shore as it drew closer.

Well-tilled farms were in evidence in this direction, and they could see men at work some distance away.

Farm houses dotted the landscape here and there, and horses and cattle were to be made out in the meadows.

Over all lay the brilliant afternoon sunshine.

Under different circumstances the scene would have interested the two boys.

"Suppose this old hulk was to spring a leak and go down, where would we be at?" asked Joe, suddenly.

"At the bottom of the river," replied Bob, with a faint chuckle.

At that moment the boat swung around a bend and was swept within ten feet of the banks.

"If some boy was only down here fishing or swimming, now," said Joe, "we could easily attract his notice and get him to free us."

"If is a small word, but oh, my! it does make a great figure in the world. If Steve Fowler hadn't stolen my father's money, we wouldn't be in this fix."

"If Steve hadn't stolen the money, we wouldn't have been at his cottage to save his children and his home. The wicked reap the reward sometimes while the good get it in the neck."

The flatboat began to recede from the shore again.

"We're going back into the middle of the river once more," said Joe.

"I see we are. I'll bet if we were on a pleasure jaunt we'd see a dozen boys scattered along the bank. When a fellow wants anything badly, that's the time he doesn't get it."

"I've noticed that fact before," replied Joe. "Say, how long have we been on the river, anyway? It seems like hours."

"Not over an hour, I guess."

"I'm getting deuced hungry, do you know?"

"Are you? Then tighten your belt. I've heard that is a good antidote."

"I don't wear a belt," growled Joe.

"Then you'll have to grin and bear it."

"Aren't you hungry, too?"

"Not so much; but if I had father's money in my pocket now, I'll bet I'd be as hungry as a hunter."

Another hour passed and still not a soul did they see within easy distance of the stream, which had now narrowed down to a width of less than a hundred yards across, and seemed to be getting as crooked as a ram's horn.

At one time they'd be within a yard or two of the bank on one side and then the current would sweep them close to the opposite shore.

It became a matter of wonder to them that the old boat didn't go aground somewhere at one of the many turns.

The position of the sun in the sky plainly showed that the afternoon was drawing to its close, though it would still be light for several hours.

Sometimes the shore presented a thickly wooded aspect and then again the fields and pastures stretched away on both sides.

At length the river grew still narrower and they appeared to be sailing through a good-sized wood.

Suddenly, as they swung around a bend, they saw two men, not over well dressed, seated on a log near the water's edge.

Each had a paper bundle on his knee, the contents of which they were eating.

The boys were about to hail them when the nose of the craft hit a projecting bit of the bank ahead and suddenly came to a stop.

The end the boys were in—that is, the after part—slowly swung inward until it finally rested against the bank right under the spot where the two men sat.

"Sing out, Bob," said Joe, in some excitement at their anticipated liberation. "These fellows will let us out in a jiffy."

Bob put his face against the opening to do so when he heard one of the men say something to the other that stopped him.

"Why don't you shout?" said Joe in his ear.

"Hush!" replied Bob, turning his head partly around so that his ear was against the opening, and grasping his astonished friend by the arm.

"What's the matter?" quivered Joe.

Bob merely held up his hand for silence.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH PERSEVERANCE CONQUERS.

"We ought to be able to make a good haul out of Graham's Mill to-night," Bob heard one of the men say. "To-morrow is pay-day, and it's the treasurer's custom to go over to Centerville the afternoon before, draw the money, and then

keep it in the safe in the office overnight. We've just learned that the regular watchman is sick, and it's more than likely some greenhorn will be on guard. That will make things easier for us. Pay-day being every two weeks, there ought to be a good wad in the safe to-night, and we've got the tools that'll whistle it open in no time."

"I agree with you, Jackson," said the other. "The village hain't had a robbery for years, and the people don't expect nothin' of the kind is likely to happen. Although the place has taken a boom on, and seems likely to spread itself to some extent before long, they hain't made no pervision yet for raisin' more constables. The two who now attend to the night duty are slower than molasses. At the present moment Riverdale is a regular cinch for a pair of experienced chaps like us."

"That's what it is, Billings," replied Jackson, complacently. "It oughtn't to take us more'n an hour to get into that safe, and then with the boodle in our clothes we'll skip out for Chicago and enjoy life while the rhino lasts."

"With the proceeds of the Chester job in our grips, which we'll be able to pawn in Chicago without danger, and \$1,000 to \$1,500 in bills from the mill safe, we ought to be able to live high for the next three or four months."

"You kin bet we will," said Jackson, taking out his pipe, filling it and striking a light, an example immediately followed by his companion.

"That there factory couldn't be in a better spot for our purpose," remarked Billings. "It's quite isolated from the regular part of town."

"It is at present, but it won't be for long. The railroad is buildin' a branch that will soon be finished, and six months from now there will be a dozen more manufacturin' establishments all around the Graham Mill."

"We kin come back then and make another haul," chuckled his companion.

"We'll think about that later on. Say, pard, is that a boat hauled up in them bushes?"

"Whereabouts?"

"Down there. Don't you see it?"

"I see it now. Sure it's a boat."

"I wonder what it's doin' there? It should be just the thing for us to take charge of. When we've cracked the crib we could row up to Westlake in it and take the first train in the mornin' East from there."

"That will be just the thing. What luck!" replied Billings. "We'd better hide it somewhere else, so that if the owner comes back lookin' for it to-night he won't find it."

"All right. You're younger than me, so just you attend to it while I finish my smoke."

Billings accordingly got up, and Bob heard him moving away.

Ten minutes of silence followed, during which Bob whispered the gist of the conversation he had just overheard to Joe, and warned him to remain quite still.

When Billings returned he told his companion where he had hidden the boat among some rushes a hundred yards away.

At this moment Bob noticed that the flatboat was working away from the bank.

It was only the stern that moved, however, and very slowly at that.

As the legs of the two crooks came into the lad's range of vision above on the bank, Bob overheard the man Jackson say:

"Hist! There's some one comin' this way. It may be the owner of the boat. We'd better hide."

The rascals rose and concealed themselves among the tall bushes near at hand.

As the flatboat swung further off Bob, to his great astonishment, saw Steve Fowler appear from among the trees with a bundle under his arm.

He sat down on a rock within a yard or two of the spot where the crooks had vanished, and without appearing to notice the flatboat, opened the bundle and began to eat something that was in it.

Bob and Joe watched him furtively from their prison pen.

"He stopped here to buy something to eat at the village beyond—Riverdale, one of those rascals called it. I'll bet that was his boat the crook took possession of and hid further away. He'll find himself stranded here now. If we were only able to get out of this place, we could take him by surprise and get the money away from him without trouble. I'd just as soon lay him out with a clip over the head with a stone as look at him."

They watched Steve eat his meal with considerable appetite, and the operation made Joe hungrier than ever, though it did not have the same effect on Bob.

Although neither was aware of the fact, two other pair of eyes were on Fowler at the same time.

The eyes, as the reader will surmise, belonged to the crooks who had temporarily withdrawn from the scene.

"If those rascals who just left knew that Steve had \$1,200 in his clothes, I guess they wouldn't leave it long in his possession," whispered Joe.

"I'll bet they wouldn't," returned Bob. "His advantage is that he doesn't look like a capitalist. No one to look at him would imagine he had any money to speak of."

"I should say not. He looks like a tramp more than anything else."

Steve continued to eat until he had satisfied his appetite, then he rolled up the remainder of his provender and placed the package at his feet.

After taking a cautious survey of the neighborhood he placed his hand inside of his undershirt and drew out Mr. Channing's black pocketbook.

Bob and Joe watched this action on his part with eager interest.

"That's my father's wallet," whispered Bob, excitedly.

"He's opening it," replied Joe. "Going to count the money, I'll bet."

That was evidently Steve's intention.

He took the bills out of the wallet and, laying them across his knee, began to go over them one by one, moistening his fingers as he proceeded.

While he was thus engaged the boys saw the bushes parted behind him and the faces of the two crooks appear.

"Great Scott!" gasped Bob. "There's those rascals now watching him. They'll do him up for that money as sure as fate."

Joe was of the same opinion, though he said nothing in reply.

After the crooks had fully satisfied themselves that Fowler had a bunch of money in his possession, they stealthily advanced upon him from behind and suddenly pounced upon him.

He was taken completely by surprise, and the money and pocketbook fell to the grass.

Then the man Jackson struck him on the head with the butt of his revolver, which he had drawn for the purpose, and Steve was knocked out for fair, dropping like an ox in the shambles.

Billings stooped and grabbed up the scattered notes which, without counting, he crammed into his pocket.

The rascals then picked up a pair of large grips, which had been hidden in the grass, and, leaving their victim on the ground, silently took their way through the wood, disappearing from the boys' sight.

Bob and Joe turned and looked at each other.

"Your father's money is in worse hands than it was before," said Joe. "You've seen the last of it now."

"I don't know about that," replied Bob, drawing a long breath. "Those rascals are going to remain in this vicinity for some hours yet, for they intend to burglarize the Graham Mill at Riverdale. We must make another strenuous effort to get out of the hold."

"I don't see how we're going to do it. We've already done our best and failed. We can't crawl out of these six-inch square windows. I'm ready to try anything you say, but I'm afraid we're cooped up here for an indefinite stay. The worst of it is, we're anchored in this beastly wood, which makes our chances all the slimmer."

Bob made no answer, but a look of determination came over his features.

He drew back opposite the slide as far as he could, then rushed at it and planted his foot against the fastened and with all the force he could muster.

The door shivered, but did not show any signs of yielding. He repeated this effort several times, and then told Joe to try.

Joe made the door quake and rattle, yet in the end it defied his most sturdy attempts to break it open.

"This is the fiercest proposition I've ever been up against," he said, when he finally threw up the sponge.

"If at first you don't succeed, try once more," said Bob, again making a battering-ram out of his foot.

The continuous falling of a drop of water in one place on a stone, however hard, will in time wear out a hole.

So the steady lambasting the door got from the boys weak-

ened the lower slide until finally one of Joe's kicks demolished the outer edge of it completely and the door yielded at the corner where the force had been mostly applied.

This success encouraged the boys to keep up the good work, and as it is a known fact that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so, strong as this door still was in the main, its ability to hold out rested wholly on the power of resistance offered by the weakened end.

The boys went for that end in desperate earnestness, and it soon began to sag outward under every blow, bending and twisting the hasp out of shape.

With intervals for rest, the boys banged away for more than an hour, for it seemed to be the only avenue of escape from the cuddy.

At length a tremendous kick from Joe's foot completed the demoralization of the slide.

It flew upward, snapping the hasp in two.

"Eureka!" yelled Joe, seizing the bottom of the door and pushing it outward until the upper slide snapped off.

"Now, altogether!" cried Craig. "Push out with all your might, Bob."

Their united muscle snapped the door off at the other end, and it fell onto the deck, leaving the way to freedom clear before them.

Joe sprang out on deck, quickly followed by Bob.

"Free at last!" cried the latter, exultantly.

CHAPTER VII.

TRYING TO PREVENT A CRIME.

"Gee! It feels good to be out of that hole," said Joe, expanding his chest and inhaling a deep breath; "but oh, lor', I believed I'm crippled for life," and he limped up and down the deck of the flatboat.

Bob was also sensible that his right leg was sore and lame from the unusual exercise it had been called upon to perform.

"Let's go ashore and see what shape Steve Fowler is in. He's been lying like a dead man for more than an hour. I hope they didn't injure him so seriously that he won't recover."

Steve was beginning to recover his senses when they reached him, and they concluded to let him complete the operation.

It was just sundown and Bob said they had better go on to Riverdale as fast as they could and see about check-mating the two crooks.

"We'll notify Mr. Graham as soon as we find out where he lives that an attempt is to be made to-night to rob the mill office safe. Then it will be up to him to figure out how the rascals may be captured. If they are coppered, I'll stand a first-class show of getting my father's money back, and then our afternoon's adventure will not have been without result."

"We can't reach the village any too quick to suit me," replied Joe. "I'm almost famished. I could make a square meal disappear quicker than a conjurer makes a pack of cards vanish. I'm hungry enough to tackle a boardinghouse steak, and they say that's the toughest thing on record."

"I think I could do something in the eating line myself," answered Bob, as they started off in the direction of a distant church spire which they believed indicated the village of Riverdale.

They soon found that they had a stiff walk before them, for they had to cross several fields before they came to the road that led to the village.

By the time they reached the turnpike they had worked their lameness off, and they now made better speed.

As they drew near a farmhouse close to the road, Joe suggested that they stop there and buy a few slices of bread and a glass of milk apiece to appease their appetites a little.

Bob agreed, as he wanted to make some inquiries.

So they marched up to the farmhouse and stated their wants to the good-natured woman who answered their knock.

When she learned that they hadn't eaten anything since morning, she told them to walk right into the kitchen and she would let them have some meat and bread, an apple pie, and all the milk they could drink.

They were soon seated at the table, and the way the meat and bread disappeared from their plates was a caution.

"You are hungry, aren't you?" said the woman.

"Hungry!" gurgled Joe. "Don't mention it. I'm so hungry I can hardly stop to chew. Pass that milk jug, Bob. Gee! that pie looks good. I'd rather have a slice of that than the deed to a hundred-acre farm."

The woman cut the pie in quarters and told the boys to help themselves.

Joe got the first slice, and every crumb vanished like the dew on the grass before the morning sun.

Then he tackled a second slice.

While he was eating it the farmer came into the room, and Bob asked him if the village ahead was Riverdale.

The agriculturist said it was.

"Can you tell me where Graham's Mill is?"

"It's about a mile from here down the road, and half a mile this side of the village," replied the farmer.

"There are no houses near it, are there?"

"No. It sets off from the road by itself."

"Kind of a lonesome spot at night, isn't it?"

The farmer nodded.

"Where does Mr. Graham, the proprietor of the mill, live?"

"You're going on to the village, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then you're bound to pass his house before you get there. He lives in a fine mansion near the junction of the county road and Main street. It's surrounded by a lawn and has an observatory on top."

"Thank you," said Bob. "I guess that is all I wish to know."

A few minutes afterward the boys took their leave of the hospitable farmer and his wife, and refused to take any pay for the food they had so generously furnished the lads.

"I feel like a fighting cock now," said Joe, when they were on the road once more. "I could have eaten twice as much, but what we had went to the right spot."

"That's right. An empty stomach kind of takes all the enthusiasm out of a fellow."

"I should say that it does."

"It will be dark before we reach the mill."

"Are you going to stop there?"

"No. I'm going straight on to see Mr. Graham."

Dusk was rapidly fading into the darker shades of night when they came in sight of the mill, which stood about a hundred yards back from the road.

With a line of woods a short distance in the rear and not a house within a radius of a quarter of a mile, it certainly did look lonesome at that hour.

It was a three-story frame structure, with numerous windows for the admission of light and air, and a small brick ell that the boys easily judged to be the engine-room, for a tall, black smokestack projected through its roof.

There was no fence surrounding it like that of the Westgate Woolen Mills, where Bob's father was employed, so that one could walk right up to the building from any point of the compass.

A solitary light shone from a window on the ground floor at one corner.

The boys afterward found out that this was the office.

"I guess there is no one on the premises now but the watchman," remarked Bob, as they tramped past. "It certainly strikes me as an easy place to rob, provided the thieves have the tools and the experience with which to break into the safe."

Joe agreed with him, and said he wondered the owners would keep a large sum of money in what was probably an ordinary safe so far outside the village with only a single watchman to guard it.

"Oh, it's safe enough under the general run of conditions in village neighborhoods. Professional cracksmen very seldom are attracted to such small places as Riverdale. Tramps and such scallwags are about the only dangerous characters that float around here, and they couldn't open a safe if they knew there was a million dollars inside of it. It takes tools and expert knowledge to get the best of any kind of a modern safe, and the one at the mill is probably a good one, if it isn't a large one. The two crooks we are trying to run down appear to be professionals provided with the tools that will make short work of any ordinary safe. They drifted to Chester somehow, robbed a house or two there, by their own admission, and while in the town learned something about Graham's Mill. Then they came on to the village, reconnoitered the ground, learning further particulars that decided them to make the attempt on the mill to-night. No doubt they were in hiding in the wood where we saw them all afternoon."

"Now that they've got hold of that \$1,200 belonging to your father, they might give up the mill enterprise and light out."

"Don't you believe it. They look upon the mill job as a dead open-and-shut game. They don't expect to have the

least trouble in getting away with the money they expect to find in the safe."

"Then it's a pretty sure thing that they'll go there to-night."

"I'd be willing to gamble on it."

"At about what time?"

"I didn't hear them mention any time, but I dare say they'll start in early, as the place is so lonesome; for the sooner they get through the more time they'll have to get away before they calculate the discovery of the robbery will be made."

"At that rate there isn't any time to be lost in arranging for their capture."

"Well, they probably will not get down to business before ten o'clock. I dare say they figure on taking a couple of hours to do the job. It is now somewhere around half-past seven, I judge. There's the house with the observatory yonder. That's where Mr. Graham lives. It won't take me long to put him wise to the situation."

"If you find him at home."

"The chances are he's at home."

Five minutes later the two boys entered the front gate and walked up the gravel walk to the veranda of the Graham residence.

Bob rang the bell, and after an interval a servant opened the door about six inches, or as far as a steel chain would permit, and asked who was there.

"Is Mr. Graham at home?" asked Bob.

"No," replied the servant, "he is not at home."

"Too bad!" said the boy in a tone of great disappointment.

"I wanted to see him on business of the greatest importance."

"Who sent you?"

"Nobody sent me. Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Graham? It is positively necessary that I see him as soon as possible."

"Who is there, Maria?" asked a girlish voice at that juncture.

"Two boys who want to see your father on important business," replied the servant.

"Who are they?"

"I don't know, miss. Shall I ask their names?"

"Certainly. If we know them let them in, and I will talk to them."

"My name is Bob Channing. My friend here is Joe Craig. We live in Westlake."

The servant repeated this reply to the young lady, who, full of curiosity as to the mission of the young strangers, came to the door and looked out at them.

As it was dark outside she could see little more than their outlines.

"What is your business with my father?" asked Miss Graham, looking at the indistinct figure of Bob.

"It is very important, miss. It concerns the mill."

"The mill!" she exclaimed, with a tremor in her voice.

"There is nothing wrong there, I hope?"

"Nothing at present, I believe, but there will be in a couple of hours or so unless I can see your father and warn him."

"My gracious!" cried the girl. "Bring a lamp, Maria. Excuse me, Mr. —"

"Channing," said Bob.

"Excuse me, Mr. Channing, for not admitting you, but it is necessary that we be cautious at night when my father is away. You say you are from Westlake?"

"Yes, miss."

"And you came from there to see my father?"

"No, miss. I suppose I might as well tell you the truth, though it will probably startle you. The reason I wish to see your father is because I have found out that the mill office is to be broken into to-night and the safe robbed."

The young girl uttered a suppressed scream at this startling intelligence.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

Maria now appeared with the lamp, and the girl, taking it out of her hand, held it above her head so that the light would fall full upon the two boys.

As they looked to be thoroughly respectable and honest, Miss Graham was reassured and decided to admit them.

Accordingly the chain was let down, the door opened, and the boys invited to enter, which they did.

The girl led them into the dining-room and then introduced herself as Gertie Graham, the mill owner's only daughter.

She was an uncommonly pretty and winsome girl, and that

fact immediately impressed itself on both of the young visitors.

Bob having constituted himself spokesman, a position not disputed by Joe, who always considered himself as second fiddle where his chum was concerned, Miss Gertie naturally bestowed most of her attention on him.

She saw that he was a good-looking, manly boy, with an engaging address, and she took an immediate liking for him.

"Now, Mr. Channing, will you explain matters to me? You say that you found out a robbery is to be committed at the mill to-night?"

"Yes, Miss Graham."

"How did you happen to discover this plot? Do you know who the men are?"

Bob, before replying, glanced at the gilt clock on the mantel and saw that it was on the stroke of eight.

"To make you thoroughly understand all the circumstances, I'd have to tell you what brought me and my friend, Joe Craig, to this neighborhood. I'm afraid that would take more time than we can afford to lose, for there is no telling when the two rascals, who I can assure you positively are professional crooks, may get to work at the mill, and I have as much interest in having them captured as your father can have. They have in their possession \$1,200 belonging to my father, and I am very anxious to recover that money."

"My father and mother have gone to Chester to visit my aunt, who is very ill. The best thing that I can do will be to telephone the head constable, and have him come over here. I will tell him to stop on the way at the homes of the two foremen of the mill, and also at Mr. Black the treasurer's house, and to bring any other help he can pick up," said Gertie Graham, rising from her chair.

"That will answer first rate," replied Bob. "If we can get half a dozen men together, Joe and I will make eight. That ought to be force enough to capture the rascals, particularly if we can take them by surprise, as I should like to do."

The young lady at once called up the head constable at his house, which adjoined the village lock-up, and got the officer's wife on the wire.

She said that her husband was out, but she thought she knew where he was and would send for him at once.

Gertie replied that the matter was of the utmost importance, and that if she was unable to find her husband right away she must ring up Squire Hogan and tell him that Miss Graham wanted to talk with him.

"I can't do anything more till either the constable or the justice rings me up," said the girl, hanging up the receiver.

"While we are waiting I will tell you as much of my story as I can," replied Bob, beginning at once to recount in as few words as possible how his father had been robbed of all his savings that morning by his fireman at the Westgate Mill; how he had started in pursuit of the thief, run across Joe, and how they had arrived at the Fowler home in time to save the rascal's children and his cottage from the flames.

Then he went on to state how Fowler had overcome both Joe and himself, tumbled them into the cuddy, or after hold, of the flatboat, and then sent them adrift on the river, and how they had floated down the stream for the greater part of the afternoon until the boat was stranded among the shallows of the woods a good three miles to the southwest of Riverdale.

He was just on the point of introducing the crooks into his narrative when the telephone bell rang, and Miss Gertie got up to answer it.

The head constable was on the wire, and the girl soon put him in possession of all necessary particulars, told him what she wanted him to do, and advised the utmost haste.

The officer promised to be over as soon as he could with a force sufficient to grapple with the situation.

Gertie Graham told Bob what the constable said, and then asked him to go on with his story.

The boy took up the thread of his narrative at the point where the two crooks came on the scene, and told the girl how he had overheard their plans concerning the proposed robbery of her father's mill that night.

Then he told her how Fowler had appeared and how the rascals had knocked him out and taken the \$1,200 away from him.

After that he detailed the strenuous efforts, finally successful, of Joe and himself to break out of their floating prison.

At this juncture there came a loud ring at the front door bell.

Maria, the servant, went to the door and admitted Con-

stable Howard, Treasurer Black, the two foremen of the mill, and one of the night watch.

Bob immediately told them such particulars as he considered necessary, and advised instant action.

Constable Howard and Mr. Black agreed that no time should be lost, and so after the boys had bidden Miss Graham good-night, and Bob particularly had been invited by her to call back in the morning if he and his friend remained overnight in the village, as it was very likely they would be obliged to do, the party took up its line of march for the mill.

It was now nine o'clock, and they lost no time in covering the intervening half mile.

The lamp was still burning in the mill office when they came in sight of the place, and a halt was called under the shadow of a big oak tree to determine how they ought to proceed.

"It is quite possible that those rascals are hanging around the neighborhood at this moment waiting until they think the time is ripe for them to force their entrance into the mill," said Bob. "If they should see us walk to the building in a body, that would certainly scare them off and we should have no chance at all to catch them. I think it would be better for us to remain right here and watch. We can't fail to see them when they approach the mill, and they will be unaware of our presence. My idea is to let them get into the building. Then two of us can post ourselves in front of the office and two in the rear. That will cut off their retreat. Mr. Howard, his deputy, and either Mr. Black or myself will then enter and overpower them while they are engaged at the safe."

Bob's proposition was voted the most prudent and effective plan for capturing the crooks, and was decided on.

The seven stretched themselves out on the ground and awaited developments.

Nothing happened to break the monotony of their watch for nearly two hours, and the party were showing signs of impatience when Joe suddenly called attention to two figures slouching from the wood in the rear of the mill.

"Here they come now," he said, in a tone of suppressed excitement, and in an instant the seven watchers were on the alert ready for business.

The rascals carried each a good-sized grip in his right hand, and they drew near the mill with some caution.

Finally they halted and held a consultation; then one, leaving his bag with his companion, advanced and proceeded to reconnoiter the office through the windows.

After a time he made some signs to his confederate and the other came forward.

They halted at the employees' entrance to the mill, and one of them producing a jimmy proceeded to force the door, which he effected without much trouble.

Taking their grips with them, they disappeared inside the building.

"We'd better give them time enough to capture the watchman and get down to work," said Bob. "Then we'll creep up and take them by surprise."

Constable Howard nodded, and no move was made for a matter of about twenty minutes.

At the end of that time the constable directed the advance to be made.

Joe and one of the foremen were stationed outside the front door.

Treasurer Black and the other foreman took their places at the rear of the building, while the two officers, with drawn revolvers, accompanied by Bob, entered by the employees' entrance.

With great caution they made their way through the lower floor to the door communicating with the office, which was shut.

Constable Howard turned the knob, opened the door an inch or two, and looked in.

The two crooks were at work on the safe.

Throwing the door wide open, the three rushed inside, the two officers covering the rascals with their revolvers.

"Throw up your hands or we'll perforate you on the spot!" cried Constable Howard, sternly.

Jackson and Billings, taken by surprise, looked into the frowning muzzles of the weapons and, realizing that the game was up, sullenly yielded.

"Take my revolver and cover that scamp nearest the safe," said the chief constable to Bob.

Then the officer, who was a six-footer and wore a very determined look, walked forward and handcuffed the rascals together.

"Turn out their pockets," said Bob. "I want my father's \$1,200."

Nearly \$900 was found on each of the prisoners, and the constable took charge of it.

Bob then learned that his father would not be able to get his money until after the crooks were tried at Chester.

"I will turn the money and the two grips over to the court, where they will remain until the case against these chaps has been decided. Then your father can put in his claim for his \$1,200, accompanied by your sworn statement of the circumstances."

The watchman was found bound and gagged under a table in the office, and was liberated.

Then the entire party took up its line of march for the village.

CHAPTER IX.

BOB AND JOE RETURN TO WESTLAKE.

Bob and Joe were quartered at the Riverdale Inn that night, and next morning the head constable called for them and piloted them to the office of Justice Hogan, before whom the two crooks were arraigned on the charge of the attempted burglary of Graham's Mill.

The boys gave their evidence, the constables testified to catching the rascals at work on the safe, the watchman explained how they had come upon him unawares and gagged and bound him, while Treasurer Black and the two mill foremen stated what they knew about the crime.

Jackson and Billings refused to make any statement in their own behalf, and were remanded by the justice for trial at Chester at the next term of the court.

Constable Howard communicated with the Chester police and ascertained that the home of the president of the Chester Bank had recently been broken into and \$5,000 worth of jewelry and about \$600 in money stolen.

A reward of \$500 had been offered by the banker for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the thieves.

A description of the jewelry furnished by the Chester authorities tallied with the contents of the grips taken from Jackson and Billings, and left no doubt in the mind of the constable that the men he had captured were the rascals who had robbed the banker's home.

He notified the Chester police to that effect and claimed the reward in behalf of Bob Channing and his friend, Joe Craig.

Miss Graham, who attended the examination of the crooks at the justice's office, invited Bob and Joe to return to her father's home with her and take lunch previous to their departure for Westlake.

The invitation was accepted.

Miss Gertie paid especial attention to Bob, to whom it was evident she had taken a fancy, and that young man met her advances more than half way.

During lunch Bob spoke about the boom that appeared to have struck the village, and remarked that Riverdale was likely soon to become a lively place.

Gertie coincided with him, and in the course of the conversation mentioned the fact that her father was about to establish a bank in the village.

When she learned that Bob and Joe, at the end of their vacation, were going to look up situations for themselves, she said that she was sure her father would be pleased to give them an opening in the bank if they would come to Riverdale.

The boys said they would consider an offer of that kind if Mr. Graham made it to them, but Bob added that he would rather go into business on his own account if it were possible for him to get a start.

Gertie wanted to know what kind of business attracted him, and he told her what his plans were if he was in a position to carry them out.

She was immediately interested in his scheme, and said she had no doubt her father would gladly help him to reach the goal of his ambition.

At this point a friend of Miss Graham's called to see her, and she was introduced to the boys as Miss Bettie Martin, a niece of Justice Hogan's.

She was quite an attractive brunette, and Joe Craig was rather smitten with her charms.

Miss Bettie seemed equally interested in Joe, so the four young people seemed well paired.

The boys forgot their intention of returning to Westgate right after lunch, and prolonged their stay.

At two o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Graham returned from Chester.

Gertie introduced Bob and Joe, and told her parents a few general particulars of the attempted robbery at the mill which had been frustrated by Bob's timely interference.

Bob then told his story all over again.

The mill owner expressed the obligation he felt under to the lads, especially Bob, whom he recognized as the leading spirit of the affair, and assured them that he would testify his appreciation in a substantial way.

The boys politely refused an invitation to remain to dinner, and then Mr. Graham had his coachman take them back to Westlake in his automobile.

Before they left Bob promised Gertie that he would come over soon and pay her a visit, and Joe told Miss Bettie that he would try and do the same.

The parents of both boys, although their anxiety over their unexplained absence had been relieved the preceding night by Constable Howard through the Westlake police department, were much mystified as to the object that had taken their sons to Riverdale.

"Why, Bob, what in the name of goodness took you and Joe Craig to Riverdale?" exclaimed his mother when he entered the cottage.

"Important business, mother, although we did not exactly go most of the way of our own free will," he answered, smilingly.

"We heard that you and Joe saved the cottage of Steve Fowler from burning down, and also the lives of his three children."

"That's right, mother."

"And they say Steve was there himself at the time."

"He was, mother."

"And what about your father's money that Steve stole? Couldn't you get him to give it up after what you did?"

"No, mother. As soon as the fire was out he started to make off, before Joe and I could corner him; then—but I'll tell you the whole story from start to finish, and then you'll understand better how things stand. Where's father?"

"He hasn't got home yet. I expect he's gone over to the police office to see if any word has been received about Steve."

"He can let Steve go now. The rascal hasn't got the money."

"Hasn't got the money! What do you mean? Did you succeed in getting it away from him?"

Bob then began at the beginning, which was at the engine-room of the Westlake Mills, and told his mother all that happened to him and Joe the preceding afternoon, growing out of his effort to overtake Steve Fowler and get his father's money back.

He had about finished his narration when his father came in, an hour later than his customary time.

"Well, young man," said Mr. Channing, gloomily, "what have you to say for yourself? What took you to Riverdale, with Joe Craig, yesterday afternoon, and kept you there the greater part of to-day?"

"An effort to recover your money was the cause of it, father," replied Bob.

"I suppose I needn't ask you what luck you've had? The police have not found any trace of Steve Fowler—the rascal!—so it's hardly to be supposed that you discovered any trace of him, after letting him get away from you at the fire where it has been reported that you saved his cottage and the lives of three of his children."

"You needn't worry about Steve any more," replied Bob.

"Why not?" asked his father, sharply.

"Because your money is out of his hands."

"Supper is ready," said Mrs. Channing at this point.

Bob and his father drew their chairs up to the table, and between bites Bob went all over his adventures again.

Mr. Channing listened with interest and growing expectation as the narrative developed.

He grew quite excited at the point where Bob described the knocking-out of Steve Fowler by the two crooks, and their taking possession of his money.

From that point on Mr. Channing showed eager attention right up to the point where Bob detailed the capture of the two rascals at the mill.

Then Bob told him what Constable Howard had said about the disposition of the money and valuables taken from the two crooks.

"You'd better write to the Chester authorities at once and put in your claim. I'll write out a statement, showing how the crooks got your money into their hands, and Joe and I will swear to it before a notary. You can send it on with

our letter. When the trial comes off, Joe and I will have to go to Chester anyhow to testify, and that will clinch your right to the \$1,200."

Mr. Channing regarded Bob with a proud and approving look.

A great load had been suddenly lifted from his mind.

There was every chance now that he would in time recover the money he had almost given up as lost to him forever.

"Bob," he said, with emotion, "the next hundred dollars I save shall be yours as a nest egg for your future."

"Thank you, father. Mr. Graham has promised to give me—and Joe, of course, too—something for saving the mill from being robbed; and Constable Howard, of Riverdale, said that we are entitled to the \$500 reward offered for the capture of the thieves who robbed the residence of Mr. Baldwin, president of the Chester Bank. He said he put in a claim for it in our names. So you see, father, I'm likely to have a little capital before long."

"You are richly entitled to every cent you get in connection with this affair. Don't you think so, Clara?" he said, turning to his wife.

"I do, indeed, Richard," she answered, beaming on her stalwart boy.

"Father," said Bob, after a pause, "I wish you could see your way to moving to Riverdale. You might be able to get charge of the engine-room of one of the new mills at more money than you're getting here."

"Why?" asked Mr. Channing, in some surprise.

"Well, father, as I've got to get out and hustle in a few weeks, I think there is a better chance for me to get ahead in Riverdale than here."

"What makes you think so?"

"Several reasons. Mr. Graham is going to start a bank in the village in a little while, and I'm almost certain of a position there if I will take it."

"Did he make you an offer?"

"No, but his daughter Gertie said that she was sure her father would give me an opening if I asked for it."

"A position in a bank would be better than anything I could get for you here. You had better apply for it. You could come home once a week, at any rate."

"I don't know that I should like to have Bob away from us," objected Mrs. Channing, with motherly solicitude.

"My dear, the boy's future must be considered first of all, whatever sacrifice we may be called on to make for his benefit," said the engineer.

"Then you have no objection to my going to Riverdale?" said Bob, whose ambitious thoughts were mingled with a recollection of Miss Gertie's bright eyes.

"Not if it will be to your advantage, my son. It is only ten miles from here."

"You might sell your interest in this cottage, and secure a position there as soon as the new mills are completed. Mr. Graham, I guess, could secure you the job as engineer to one of them. He wanted to hire you himself once, you told me."

"Bob's suggestion is a good one, Richard," said his wife, who was evidently in favor of such a chance now that it seemed likely that her son might go there.

"I will think about it," replied Mr. Channing, in a non-committal way.

Bob, having finished his supper, put on his hat and ran around the block to call on Joe Craig, and tell him about the possibility of his going to Riverdale to live, and to propose that Joe also apply for some kind of a job in the new bank.

CHAPTER X.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

"Then you really have made up your mind to ask Mr. Graham for a job in his bank?" said Joe.

"Well, to tell the truth, Joe, I'd rather go into business for myself; but as I am not sure that I can do that, a position in the Riverdale Bank would be better than anything else I know of."

"I mean to ask my father if he'll let me go to Riverdale, too. If he will, you can put in my application with yours to Mr. Graham. You can't better with him than I, for you were really the whole thing, once night."

"All right," replied Bob. "It would be fine to have you there, for we could room together and be together after working hours."

"Sure. Then we could call on Miss Graham and Miss Martin. They're nice girls, don't you think?"

"Bet your life they are, but I like Miss Gertie best."

"I'm glad you do, for Miss Bettie takes my eye," grinned Joe.

"That settles it. There is no danger of our becoming rivals."

"Not the slightest, old man."

The boys talked an hour longer about their prospects in Riverdale, and then Bob went home.

About a week later Bob received an invitation from Mr. Graham to come to Riverdale and stay overnight.

The mill owner said his auto would meet Bob at the Centerville station on the arrival of a certain train.

It was about eleven miles by rail from Westlake to Centerville, and the local train covered the distance in twenty-one minutes.

Bob was tickled to death at the chance to meet Gertie Graham, so he told his parents that, with their permission, he was going to Riverdale, at Mr. Graham's invitation, the next afternoon.

When he arrived at Centerville he was surprised and delighted to see Miss Graham seated in the auto.

She had done him the honor to come over and meet him.

Evidently she was taking a great interest in the young Westlaker.

The ride from the station to the Graham home was the most enjoyable Bob thought he had ever taken in his life.

Miss Gertie, who looked charming in her best clothes, laid herself out to entertain him, and Bob tried his best to do his share.

He was cordially welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Graham, and soon after his arrival dinner was announced.

After the meal Mr. Graham took Bob into his library.

"Now, Bob," said the mill owner, "first of all I will hand you Mr. Baldwin's check for \$500 to your order, covering the reward he offered in connection with the robbery which was committed at his residence by the two men whose capture you were conspicuous in bringing about."

"Thank you, sir. Half of this will go to my friend Joe Craig, who, I think, is equally entitled to participate in it."

"That is for you to decide as you think proper. Now, as far as the saving of my money is concerned, I think you are entitled to the chief recognition. I have therefore decided to give you \$500, and your friend Craig \$100. Here are the checks on the Centerville Bank."

"I don't think I am entitled to so much," replied Bob, looking at the check to his order, and feeling a certain delicacy about accepting it.

"Allow me to judge of that, my boy," answered the mill owner. "Put them in your pocket."

Bob put the three checks away.

"The next question is, do you want a position in my bank?" said Mr. Graham.

"I should like it very much, sir, provided——"

"What is the proviso?"

"I think I should prefer to start a certain business in this place if, in your opinion, you saw no great obstacles to my ultimate success."

"My daughter spoke to me about that. Let me have your views on the subject."

Bob accordingly submitted his ideas on the matter nearest his heart.

He told the mill owner what kind of business he wanted to engage in, where he desired to establish himself, and just how he proposed to conduct it.

"Of course, I'm handicapped by lack of experience, but Charley Brown, who runs a similar and successful business in Westlake, has promised to coach me as well as he can if I should manage to embark in it. I feel it in my bones that with a fair show I'll make a success of it. Now that Riverdale promises to be a place of no little importance, I want to be the first in the field in my chosen line."

Mr. Graham was much impressed by his enthusiasm and the evident energy of his character.

He saw that the boy's business ideas were good ones, and that really all he needed was the experience.

He decided then and there to help Bob achieve his object. He would give him the benefit of his influence in the village, and would back him if the little capital he had now secured was not sufficient to give him a proper start.

"Well, Bob," he said, "I think pretty well of your scheme, and I pledge you my support. When do you want to open up?"

"As soon as the railroad is finished and the new station is built."

"That will be within about three months, I think, from

present indications. In the meantime I suppose you will start in with your friend Brown and learn all you can about the business?"

"That's just what I mean to do. I'll give him my services in return for his instruction and advice."

"An excellent arrangement. Now, the station is to be built on Main street, in a prominent location. I sold the ground to the company, but I have a plot alongside of it. I intend to put up a building on it with a double store—one side for the post-office, already spoken for, and the other for the local druggist. Now, instead of the druggist, you shall have the store next to the post-office. So you will have the station on one side and the post-office on the other to draw custom to you."

"That will be fine," exclaimed Bob, enthusiastically.

"They will certainly help you, while your store will be in the most prominent situation in Main street."

"But do you think I'll be able to stand the rent at the start?"

"Don't worry about the rent. We will speak of that later. The main point at issue at present is to give you the chance to establish yourself. There is no regular stationery and periodical store in Riverdale as yet, so you will be the first in the field, as you desire. Your general ideas for drawing custom are good, and I think with your energy and perseverance you will get along. Of course, you will have uphill work at the start, as the village is a small one as yet, but there will be a great change inside of six months. Four manufacturing establishments are going to be erected and put into operation within that time, and they will employ, I understand, about 2,000 people who will have to live here. I shall have to enlarge my own mills, and hire more help, to keep abreast of the orders that are coming in. All things considered, I don't think you could start out for yourself under more encouraging auspices."

Bob fully agreed with the genial mill owner, and thanked him for the interest he was showing in his behalf.

"Don't mention it, Bob. I have taken a liking for you, and want to give you a boost."

Bob then thought of Joe, and asked Mr. Graham if he would give his friend a position in the bank.

"I will, if only to oblige you. Let me have his name and address."

Bob gave it to him, and then began to speak about having his parents move to Riverdale from Westlake.

"Do you think you could get my father the position as engineer in one of the new mills?" he asked.

"I think I made your father an offer myself when I first started my mill," said Mr. Graham, "but he did not care to accept it."

"That was because he had bought a cottage in Westlake and expected to remain there permanently."

"I dare say he would have little trouble in selling his place if he wanted to make a change."

"That's what I told him. At any rate, mother wishes to come here if I do, and she can't come unless father does."

"Well, Bob, it is possible that I may find it necessary to hire another engineer in place of the man I have. If so, I will make your father an offer."

"Thank you, sir. I will tell him."

After some further conversation they adjourned to the parlor, where Mrs. Graham and Miss Gertie awaited them.

Gertie played on the piano and sang for Bob, and then Bob was induced to sing some himself.

He had a very good voice, and it chimed in well with the girl's.

After a very pleasant evening, Bob retired to the guest chamber and slept like a top until morning, notwithstanding that his head was chock full of brilliant anticipations for the future.

After breakfast he walked around the village with Gertie. Naturally, he was especially interested in Main street, particularly in that section where the station was to be built, and where he expected his store was to be.

After lunch he was driven back to the station, and took a train for home.

CHAPTER XI.

FIRST IN THE FIELD.

After supper that evening Bob went around to Joe's house. "See what I've brought you," he said to his chum, holding up the \$100 check.

Joe grabbed it.